



## YOUR LETTERS

## MAILBOX

While a couple of readers debate the merits of Asus's new Eee PC, others show that some things never change as they give Microsoft a good kicking

## ★ Looking for some peace and quiet Finding a silent PC



We are trying to find a smaller PC to replace an ageing tower model that is now three years old. We are getting fussy in our old age and now find we want more in a PC but with less mass and definitely quieter.

We plan to do some video work and allow the children to play the latest games, so speed and disk space need to be reasonable, with some built-in future proofing. Acer and Dell seem to do some models along these lines, but it is not clear to us how capable they are of coping with this work, and if they are quiet.

Trying to find a small form PC that is up to the job and runs quietly seems amazingly difficult considering the advances in the past few years. Are you planning any articles on quiet and powerful PCs?

*David Moore*

It is possible to buy reasonably powerful PCs that use low-powered components and few or no fans. The result is a virtually silent computer



that is fast enough to run fairly standard office tasks, play certain games and handle video and music playback. However, when it comes to playing the latest games and editing video, you need something more powerful, and that almost inevitably means something larger and noisier.

There are ways to quieten a PC, ranging from placing it on a soft surface or in a cupboard to buying specialist equipment such as near-silent cooling fans, efficient (and completely silent) heat sinks and even acoustic foams. We will be publishing a report about how effective these methods are in the coming months.

In addition to that, we are developing tests that will determine the noisiness of all the computers we test. It's not a straightforward project, but in the future you'll be able to tell how noisy (and how annoying that noise is) each PC, printer and other item is before you buy it.

◀ Computers such as VeryPC's GreenPC can be compact and still very powerful

## SENSE OF INSECURITY



On page 172 of *Shopper* 239 you reported that an unprotected PC would become infected with a virus within eight seconds. You then explained the procedure for installing the Kaspersky software on the cover disc, the first step of which was to remove existing anti-virus software.

As the entire installation takes a few minutes I would have thought that the first step would be to disconnect from an 'always on' broadband internet connection. Later, after entering the activation code, you would reconnect to the internet for product registration and to complete the installation.

I can't recall seeing the above procedure in *Computer Shopper* or in any of the lesser mags, but I feel that being connected without active anti-virus might be leaving the user wide open to infection.

*Dave Holden*

If you want to be 100 per cent safe from internet-borne viruses, then disconnecting from the internet is a good idea. Turning off anti-virus software provides a window of opportunity for infections, so your advice is good.

However, there are occasions where you can safely turn off anti-virus software, perhaps to install an alternative. Firewalls are good at stopping viruses that target vulnerable systems (known as worms), and a personal firewall program can keep your PC safe from these even if you turn off the anti-virus protection.

Windows comes with a reasonable firewall and pretty much any firewall built into broadband routers will also be up to the job.

Bear in mind that, even with a firewall in place, your system will be vulnerable to viruses that you actively download from the web, accidentally install by visiting infected webpages or receive as attachments in email.

## DRIVES ME CRAZY



I've got a quad-boot machine running two flavours of Linux and two versions of Windows (XP and 98). However,

Windows 98 is about to bite the dust because I now have 1.5GB of memory, which is too much for this older operating system. There's no way Windows 98 will run on it, and I've tried all the workarounds.

Why would I still want Windows 98 to work? Well, I have an ancient but fully functional SCSI scanner that does all I want. I belong to the generation that hates to chuck something out when it still does the job. When I say 'ancient' I mean I bought it in 1992, when it cost me around £700. It ran on my 386 PC with Windows 3.1 and 16MB of memory.

When Windows 95 appeared the scanner continued to work with a new driver, which also worked perfectly well in Windows 98. However, Windows XP doesn't work with it, which is a shortcoming with XP in my opinion. Some call that progress.

The big surprise is that this scanner is supported under Linux. It wasn't so until about a year ago, but

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now it's there in the hardware compatibility list next to the magic words, "All features supported". Somebody must have felt the way I did and had more knowledge about such things than I do. Using Kooka (presently my Linux scanner software of choice) it works just fine.

I suppose it had to happen eventually. I now have my first piece of hardware that doesn't work under Windows but which does work with Linux.

Everything else I have works under XP and Linux, including my new Canon DSLR camera, which was recognised and is fully supported by my Linux distributions. If there's a point to this, here it comes. Linux doesn't know the meaning of the word 'obsolete'. Any hardware that ever worked continues to work.

Linux was never 16-bit and, although I now run 64-bit SuSE, all the old stuff works seamlessly because 32-bit compatibility is built in from the ground up and you don't need special drivers for the 64-bit version. I use Linux more and more, and Windows less and less as time goes by. I have to use Windows because my work has specialised applications written for Windows. These will never be ported to Linux but, apart from that, I could kiss Windows XP goodbye tomorrow and never look back.

As for Windows Vista? You must be joking.  
*Roger Brownlow*

Linux certainly supports a vast number of hardware devices. As with Windows operating systems, it needs software drivers to enable cameras, scanners, printers and pretty much any PC-compatible device you can think of. As you have discovered, sometimes an operating system lacks the necessary drivers.

There are a number of issues that need to be taken into account by the people who put an operating system together when choosing supported drivers. One of the most important involves technical support. Microsoft has to decide which devices it is willing to support by providing drivers included with Windows. SCSI devices have never been embraced by consumers, even in the early 90s, so it is not surprising that the company would rather concentrate on newer technologies such as SATA, USB, FireWire, WiFi and Bluetooth.

From Microsoft's point of view, hardware manufacturers are welcome to create their own driver software for Windows. It is even possible to install drivers that have not been through Microsoft's Windows Hardware Quality Lab (WHQL) tests. For that matter, anyone is free to spend their time writing Windows driver software for current or 'obsolete' hardware.

Of course, the sort of people who want to get involved in writing drivers are probably more likely to do so for Linux and other open-source operating systems. Because they rarely work for profit, or to commercial deadlines, they will take as much time to complete the work as they choose. We remember waiting a long time for Linux Iomega Zip disk drivers and support for SyQuest EZ135 drives. Unofficial drivers often lack the technical documentation that would make it easier to write new drivers quickly, too.

There is a wide variety of Linux distributions, including 16-bit versions. Not all of them come

with the same selection of drivers, so it's not really possible to compare 'Linux' with Windows XP or Vista directly in this respect. You could compare SuSE Linux 10, however, although it's worth noting that the full distribution comes on a number of CDs while Windows XP is packed on to just one disc.

### AND AS FOR VISTA DRIVERS... FORGET IT!



Microsoft, with a little help from IBM's hardware, brought computing to the masses by providing a common working platform. Windows 3.1 caused an explosion of PC use when it was first released. Now the company seems to be doing the reverse.

*Shopper* has recently devoted many column inches to the dearth of Vista drivers for a broad spectrum of hardware. Manufacturers have had several years of stability with Windows XP, and we have all become accustomed to the simplicity and brevity of adding new gizmos to our PCs.

Did Microsoft assume that manufacturers would merely increase their workloads and decrease their wafer-thin profit margins in order to write new drivers for Windows Vista? What arrogance.

I have recently been exchanging emails with *Shopper* about recording guitar to a PC. The hardware we bought doesn't have Vista drivers, and your suggestion was to buy a copy of Windows XP. We took the advice and found it to be the best solution. The recording hardware is now working and was a breeze to install.

What a terrible advertisement for Microsoft's new operating system. The consumer buys a shiny new PC, replete with whizz-bang Windows Vista, only to find that he has to pay £50 for Windows XP, which has supposedly been superseded.

*Alan Thomas*



▲ Windows Vista still suffers from poor driver support

We'll try and defend Microsoft a little bit, before we join you in putting in the boot. Microsoft does not usually write device drivers, the onus being almost exclusively on the hardware manufacturers. So your first port of call when complaining about a lack of Vista support should really be at the door of the device manufacturer.

That said, there are quite a few pieces of hardware that still don't support Windows Vista after a full year of Vista being publicly available. Surely there's something afoot? One clue to the problem, which does place Microsoft back into a position of responsibility, is that it did not use a Hardware Abstraction Layer (HAL) when it built Vista. Windows XP used a HAL system, which made it easier for programmers to talk to

hardware such as sound cards (see *How it Works*, *Shopper* 239 for an in-depth explanation of this subject).

A lack of a HAL means that companies developing for Vista need to write their software in a different way from before. For games this means using DirectX 10. Potential benefits include increased performance and system stability. But of course, if you can't use the system for the tasks you need to perform, these issues become rather less significant.

### EEE BUY GONE



I got £300 for Christmas and was considering buying a laptop. I stumbled upon the Asus Eee PC and thought that it looked great. I checked different reviews for a week but then I figured out that I would have to buy a lot of stuff to get it up to the standard of a laptop that cost just a little bit more.

I'd have to buy things like an external hard disk, an external DVD drive and then lots of other little things. The Eee PC may be a good laptop for surfing and editing word-processing documents, but if you add just a little more money to the price you can get a half-decent laptop that needs nothing extra.

*Idrees Duffy* ☺

## WRITE IN AND WIN!

If you want to make the most out of your home movies and photographs, then Adobe's Photoshop Elements 6 and Premiere Elements 4 are the best and easiest way to do so. If you fancy getting your hands on these products, there's no need to put your hand in your pocket; all you have to do is write a great letter. Get it printed as our Star Letter, and a copy of both applications will be winging its way to you in the post.

Photoshop Elements 6 is the best home photo-editing application. Its powerful features are taken from the full Photoshop application, so you can get the same results, but Elements is a lot easier to use. Premiere Elements 4 does a similar job for movie making, pulling its features from the high-end Premiere software, but making it all easier to use so you'll be able to produce Hollywood-style movies from the comfort of your home.



### PLUS!

Every published letter-writer who provides their address also receives a *Computer Shopper* mug





▲ It may be small and perfectly formed, but the Eee PC won't suit everyone's needs

Before you buy any gadget, be it a PC or something less complex, you should assess what you need. You then balance these requirements with hardware that is available within your budget. If portability is a priority then few PCs beat the Eee PC on size, weight or price. If you need lots of storage and processor power then you'll need to consider a different computer.

It's rare to find one device that caters for everyone's needs. For example, our next correspondent wants a powerful PDA rather than a fully featured PC, so the Eee PC is ideal. If he wanted to play 3D games, though, he'd have to choose something else.

### EEE BUY ONE

After reading your review of the Asus Eee PC I wondered if one of these might be just the

thing to replace my ageing Palm PDA. I didn't want a huge phone that wouldn't fit in my pocket and the good old simple PDA seems to be an endangered species, so the Eee PC seems just the thing.

At just under £200 it was worth a try and, having bought one, I can tell you that it is brilliant! It is small enough to fit in a briefcase (or even a handbag) and it does everything I want, except that it has no organiser. If only it had a diary and address book it would be just perfect – especially if I could synch it with Outlook. I'm a Linux novice and would appreciate suggestions as to what software might be available to turn my new Eee PC into the perfect machine.

Alex Deacon

In most cases, the Asus Eee PC runs a Linux operating system, although a Windows XP version is also available. The good news for owners of the Linux version is that you don't need to be a genius to install additional software on it. The operating system includes a tool called apt-get, which can be used to download and install programs automatically from the internet.

You should be able to find a number of contact management and calendar programs available. You could even install the Thunderbird email client and then install its Lightning calendar add-on. You can even set it up to synchronise with Google Calendar.

There's a handy tutorial on installing software and performing other modifications to the Eee PC at <http://tinyurl.com/3c4ok6>.

### BROADBAND RIP-OFF PART II

Colin Partington (*Shopper 240*) has my sympathies. I suffered the same broadband speed rip-off at the hands of Tiscali. I subscribed to an 8Mbit/s package and was lucky if I was getting 340Kbit/s. After two months of correspondence, speed checks and all the other hoops they make you jump through before anyone takes you seriously, Tiscali downgraded my package to a 512Kbit/s package. This is not satisfactory when you're looking for high-speed broadband, but of course the company had achieved its goal of committing me to a contract.

The magical words 'up to' are a marketing tool that is being abused by the ISPs to attract business. It's misrepresentation at the very least, but I'm convinced it is more sinister. We all accept that 'up to 8Mb' is unlikely to yield a speed of 8Mbit/s, but surely we're entitled to expect it to be a lot more than 512Kbit/s.

The ISPs know exactly what speed they can supply to your home. In my case an engineer went to the exchange twice to do a line check before I was issued with my modem. I have no doubt that they would be able to determine the speed capability.

When I finally got someone at Tiscali to take notice of me, the customer service rep on the other end of the phone conducted a speed test through his computer terminal in no more than a few minutes, and confirmed what I had been trying to prove for two months.

They have the technology, they have the capability, but they do not have the honesty to inform you of your line speed. Well, at

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least not until they have you signed up to one of their contracts.

Michael Wood

It would be interesting to know how fast *Shopper* readers' broadband connection speeds are. We could compare these figures with the performance offered by the ISPs and let everyone know to what extent they are getting what they pay for. And guess what? Next month we're going to do just that. All *Shopper* readers are invited to take part. All you'll need to do is answer a short survey and run a speed test that we'll provide. Keep your eyes peeled for our great broadband survey next month.

#### DOTTY ANSWER



Last month Adrian asked how to insert a 'therefore' symbol using Word 2007 (*Letters, Shopper 241*).

This is already set up in Word 2007 if you activate the Math AutoCorrect option. If you type \therefore it is replaced by the dots. There are also lots of other maths symbols that can be produced using Math AutoCorrect.

Math AutoCorrect can be found in Word Options, Proofing, AutoCorrect Options. You need to select the option to use Math AutoCorrect outside math regions to use it while typing normal text.

It is even better if you use the equation editor. For example, try typing \Sigma\_

$$\Sigma_0^n(x^3+2)/(e^{(-\lambda^2+5)})$$

▲ Word's equation editor is a useful tool for dealing with mathematical terms

$0^n(x^3+2)/(e^{(-\lambda^2+5)})$ , select it and press the Alt and the equals key to invoke the equation editor. If you paste it in then you will need to click in the expression and add a space after each item (eg after \Sigma) to convert it to a proper mathematical format.

Stephen Wright

#### ANOTHER DOTTY ANSWER



The 'Dotty Question' reply in *Shopper 241* is overkill if 'therefore' is only required in Word. I couldn't immediately find it anywhere and your suggestions didn't work for me.

However, using Insert, Symbol and choosing Symbol Font shows the symbol on the third row, and it can be easily inserted from there. If Symbol is chosen as the font in a document, using <Alt>0092 enters the symbol in my version of Office 2000 running on Windows XP Home edition.

Derek

#### PAPER TIP



We are used to prices varying from shop to shop. However, I think I've found what must be in percentage terms one of the biggest differences.

I buy spindles of DVDs for TV recording purposes. This means I have to buy paper sleeves to protect them. There's a national chain of shops called Poundland, where everything is £1. For that I can buy a pack of 80 sleeves. PC World charges an amazing £9.99 for 100 paper sleeves, and the price at Maplin is the same.

Mike Conder

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